

# The Cities

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## Prologue

Spacious skies loomed overhead Sapphiress. What was once a peaceful city had turned to dust and nothing more. Memories of a simple law and civil citizens were now lost in the flames of madness. People cried out in pain as their rivals from the city of Avarae attacked them, taking their lives and destroying their homes. Evil bled from one street to the next with not one sign of hope in the air to grasp on to. But suffering and death was only the beginning. There was more at work. Michael could sense it as he stood bearing witness to the historical tragedy. He lingered on top of a large hill glaciated with white ash and burned grass. Blood stained his clothes from fighting off the Radical warriors that molested the innocence of his once great virtuous city. Sadness glazed over his cyan eyes as he watched from a distance his home crumble down to a bitter pile of ruins.

After staring long enough into the abyss of treachery, Michael finally looked away not being able to watch anymore. His right hand clutched around a ruby necklace and blue sapphire ring. The only two things he managed to take that were his mother's before she died in his arms.

*"Leave me,"* she said. Her voice was a shallow whisper.

*"I can't just leave you. There must be some way I can get you to safety. Some way I can heal you."* He had held out his hand over her chest wound. A blue electrifying spark burst from his palm.

*"Michael, no. Save your energy."*

Michael remembered the way she stared at him with such love in her eyes. He had never seen her look at him like that before. It was as if he was the last thing she always wanted to see before she died.

*"Don't give up,"* he had said. *"You are all I have left."*

But she had already gone. Her eyes half open and mouth parted as if she was about to say something, but death had taken that chance away from her.

He had killed many Radicals after that. The blood that colored his clothes, a dark maroon, had told that story. There was nothing he could do to bring her back. It was not what she would have wanted. She had sacrificed for him, and now he had to sacrifice his rage by not charging down the hill from where he stood and slaughtering everyone in sight. He would do it for her. It was her last wish.

So instead, he stood clutching her belongings in one hand and a razor sharp staff in the other, just waiting.

Daring anyone to come upon the hill and threaten him. It was what he needed. It was the urge to kill that tugged at his broken heart.

Michael fell to his knees, feeling helpless as he grabbed a handful of white ash from the ground and slowly let it slip through his fingers. He didn't know who was behind the attack, but he knew that one day he would have revenge. After burying his mother on the other side of the hill and saying a prayer, he walked back to the top to take one last look at what became of Sapphiress. But as he neared the peak of the hill, he caught a glimpse of another boy standing where he stood just minutes ago. He looked to be the same age as him, around seventeen years old.

He was a warrior like Michael. He could tell by his combat gear; a skin-tight black shirt, black pants, and boots. His midnight colored hair stuck out in all directions from fighting in the wind. A smear of blood covered the back of his neck and was most likely on his clothes, but at this point, Michael could care less. The boy wasn't dressed as a Radical, that at least should be some sign that he was safe and didn't have to spill any more blood tonight.

"Hey you," he called out to the boy. He gripped the razor spear in his hand, prepared to



fight, just in case.

The boy turned around with a half smile on his face. It almost looked pained as if he was forcing it. But who could simply smile at a time like this?

"I knew I would find you up here," he said.

"Orion," Michael let out a sigh of relief. He was so caught up in his own world of pain he had nearly forgotten what his best friend looked like. "I thought you were...Well, I assumed you were..."

"Dead?" He smirked and added with enthusiasm, "You underestimate me and my remarkable abilities." Michael smiled at his friend. It was somewhat soothing to hear Orion being his sarcastic and over-enthusiastic self.

"I'm just glad to see you are okay," said Michael. "Are you hurt at all? Where is everyone? Where are

Chasity and Tasen and Myka and the others?” Orion put a hand on Michael’s shoulder and told him to relax. He said they were safe and that was all he wanted to hear.

“Where is Lena?” asked Orion in return.

Michael put his head down and gripped the necklace and ring in his hand tighter. “Mom didn’t make it.” He barely choked out the words. Orion saw the grief in his expression and walked towards him, putting his hand on his shoulder.

“She was a mother to all of us, Michael,” he stated. “The memory of her will never be forgotten.” Michael nodded as they now both looked over the city. Orion sheathed his sword back into his belt that hung around his waist. Michael pressed his thumb hard against the metal of his weapon. The long teeth of razors on both ends of the staff retracted into each other, and the staff itself minimized and shrunk in size until it was the size of a pencil. He put it behind his ear and crossed his arms over his chest. It was like they were both thinking the same thing. ‘Honor the fallen by putting down your weapons and a moment of silence’. And that is what they did.

Michael did not leave his gaze from the black smoke coming from below. He stared at it as if the smoke was taunting him -- saying nasty things to him, mocking him of his tried effort to save his family, and laughing at him for failing.

“Do you know how this started?” Orion quizzed Michael.

Michael broke off his stare and glanced over at Orion who had been looking at him.

“Yes,” he said after a long pause. “I captured a Radical warrior near my house and forced the bloody being to tell me before I ended his pathetic life.”

“What did the Radical say?”

“They spoke of a man named Marletti. I’ve never heard of him, but he apparently is very dangerous. He ordered the attack because he was looking for something. Something that supposedly belonged to Avarae that Sapphiress had supposedly stolen. The Radical continued on about some prophecy that this guy was going to fulfill. Some bullshit fantasy if you ask me,” Michael spat, “And a waste of time.”

“I’ve heard of Marletti,” said Orion. “He’s a cold-hearted bastard. He runs the slums of Avarae and all the crooked souls that live there. It’s like his empire.”

Michael looked at him questioningly. “Then what of this thing he’s after? What is he searching for? Does anyone know?”

“I did some research on Marletti because I heard a rumor about him before the attack. I went straight to see what was in the Sapphiress Archives. I searched for hours trying to find something rational but nothing fit. I had almost given up when I came across something rather curious about the Gemmed. I cross referenced it with Marletti, and well, if I told you my theory, you would think I was crazy.”

“Try me,” said Michael.

“Ever heard of the Legend of the Gemmed Descendant?” Orion asked.

“I heard some gossip about it when I was a kid, but not the story.”

“A mortal will conceive a child who is not of their kind, but rather godly. The child being not of their world will bear a gift. It is said that this child could either take lives or save them. Depending on his will.’ Marletti has wanted to take control of Sapphiress for a long time now to get his hands on the Sacred City, but he’s never had the proper weapon.”

“He’s not looking for *something*. He’s looking for *someone*,” said Michael. “This war...It’s a distraction.” Michael ran his fingers through his damp, sweaty brown hair. So many thoughts traveled through his head. So many questions, but only one he couldn’t help but blurt out. “Has he found this person?”

Orion shook his head. “No, but I know someone who has.”

**FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS TO MICHAEL AND ORION  
IN CHAPTER ONE ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2012....**